BROOKLYN'S SPLENDID LANDMARKS PROVIDE ATTRACTIVE SETTINGS FOR SPECULATIVE BUILDERS' FLATS AND HOUSES


REMSEN HOUSE
On Church Ave.

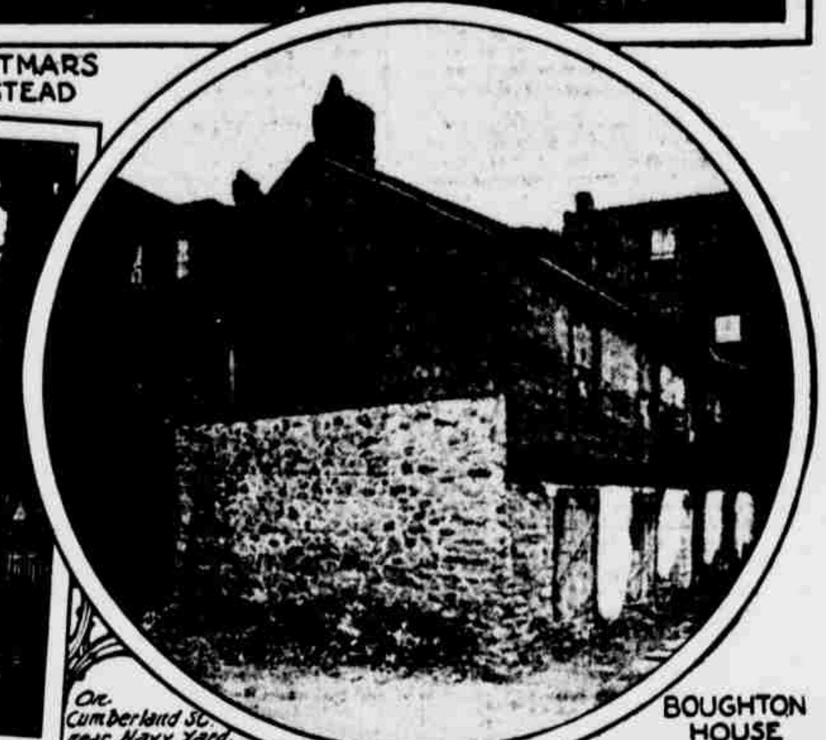

LADY DEBORAH MOODY HOUSE


THE JOHN DITMARS HOMESTEAD


SCHENCK HOUSE AT MILL ISLAND


VAN BRUNT HOUSE

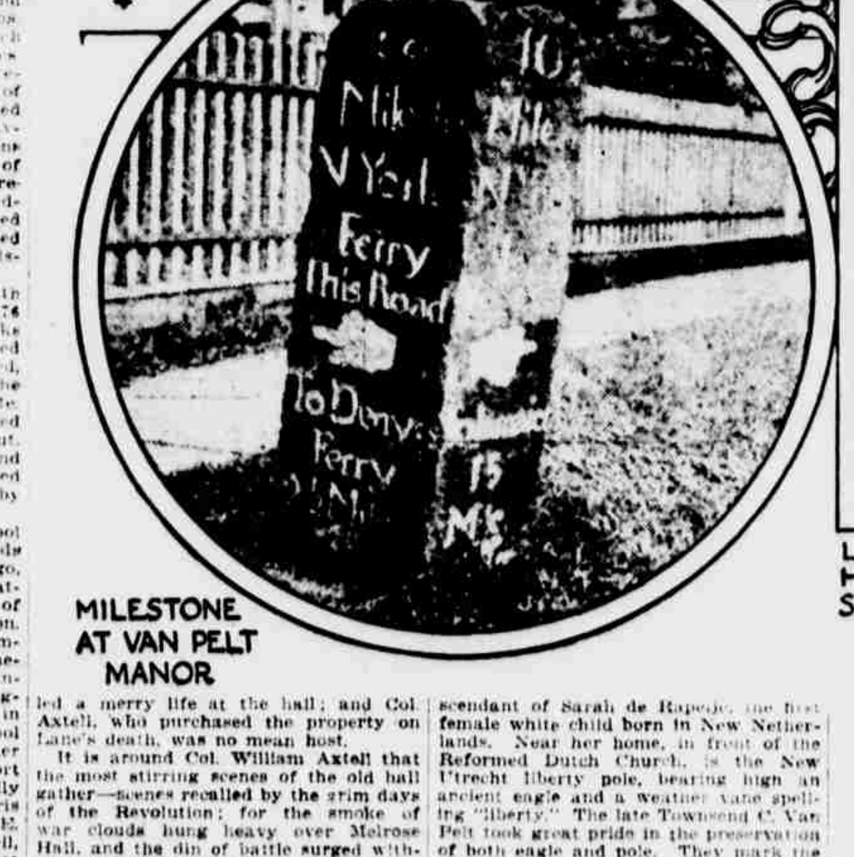

VOORHEES HOUSE


On Cumberland St. near Navy Yard.
BOUGHTON HOUSE


MELROSE ABBEY

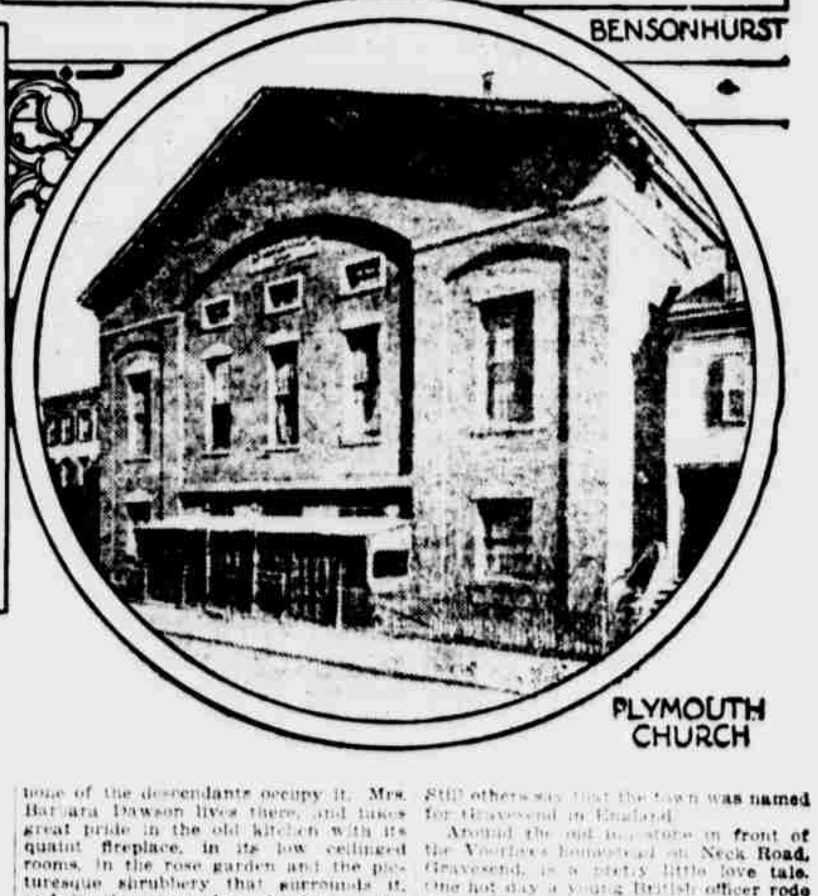

VAN PELT MANOR

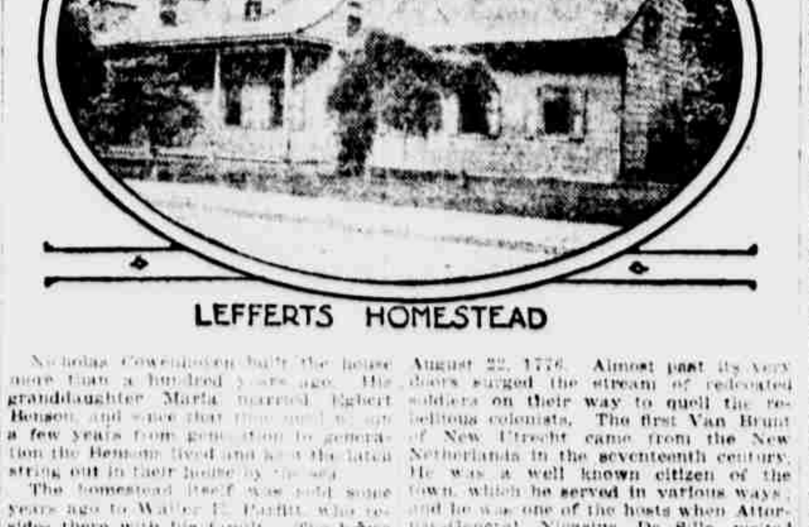

BENSONHURST



MILESTONE AT VAN PELT MANOR


LOTT HOMESTEAD


PLYMOUTH CHURCH


LEFFERTS HOMESTEAD

GLORIES of a great city, relics of historical value and reminders of events and personalities dear to its citizens are not numerous in the greater city of New York. Before a series of evolutions known as progress many of the glories of New York have been swept away to make room for revenue producing projects such as homes, business buildings, amusement places and the like. Instead of cosey old buildings which marked important events in the history of the city and the country, bronze tablets erected by historical societies tell posterity that on the spot marked history was made. In Europe, and for that matter in many parts of the United States not so given to commercial enterprise and material things, historic relics are preserved and venerated.

Up to a few years ago there were about thirty buildings in the greater city which had weathered more than a century. Most of these were in the outlying sections, particularly Brooklyn and Richmond. Manhattan seemed to have been swept almost clean of its relics. Brooklyn was rich then with places about which were facts and legends. But that was before Brooklyn had a subway running beyond Atlantic and Flatbush avenues. The new transit scheme has intersected every section of the borough. Some of the routes of this system are already in operation. With the definite settlement of the rapid transit system builders went into the old neighborhoods of the borough, parts which because of lack of good transit had been passed by flat house builders, and bought up large areas of land on which they built flat houses and small dwellings.

There is no more ruthless man than a builder. Most times he sees only the money that he can get out of a property. Its historic value is not tangible, so it receives very little consideration. Since the conclusion of the rapid transit planning many of Brooklyn's historic places and homesteads—buildings which have stood since the Dutch managed the government affairs in this part of the world—have been removed. At the rate at which they have been cleared away there will be as few in Brooklyn in the next few years as there are in Manhattan to-day. The Brooklyn Trust Company of 144 Montague street has just issued a booklet entitled "Rambles About Historic Brooklyn." In it are photographs of old homesteads still standing and others which were closely associated with historic Kings county. The book is a collection of facts, legends, traditions and reminiscences. Many rare prints and old photographs are reproduced in the book, which contains fifty interesting pages. Through the courtesy of the Brooklyn Trust Company THE SUN is able to reprint some of these prints and stories of historic Brooklyn.

The first step in the settlement of Brooklyn was made in the year 1636, when William Adriaense Bennet and Jaques Bentyn bought from the Indians 930 acres of land at "Gowanus." About a year later George Jansen de Rapelje bought a piece of land lying near the Wallabout Bay. De Rapelje was a farmer. He tilled his land and occupied a house on it until about 1654. Tradition says his daughter Sarah was the first white child born on Long Island, and that she was held in great esteem both by the Dutch and the Indians. This assertion has been modified by later historians, who say that Sarah de Rapelje was the first female white child born in the New Netherlands colony.

Cabins were built on the Long Island shore, and eventually communication was established with Manhattan by one Cornelis Dircksen, who, having the advantage of holding land on both sides of the river, conducted a ferry between the two places. He was summoned by means of a horn that hung on a convenient tree, ready for the traveller to blow when he wished to cross. "The Ferry" on the Long Island shore later became the popular resort for the settlers. A road led from it to the heights where the village of Breuckelen was thriving, which was supposed to have received its name from the Dutch, and means "broken land." It clustered close about the site of the present Borough Hall, and followed the course of Fulton street, which no doubt was originally an Indian trail.

Most of the old and historic places which have survived Indian uprisings, wars, riots and progress are to be found in the Flatbush and Flatlands sections. A few years back Flatbush was much richer in landmarks and historic relics. The Lefferts homestead on Flatbush avenue and Midwood street is the oldest of the Flatbush relics. It has occupied this site for more than 250 years, having been the home of eight generations of Leffertses and is still in possession of the Lefferts family. It is only within recent years that the wide fields surrounding the old homestead were subdivided and sold to builders who have erected many attractive dwellings on this historic estate.

On the landing of the British at Bath (now Bath Beach) in August of 1776 the American riflemen set fire to stacks of grain in Flatbush and also burned this house. Its foundations were saved, and in a short time was reared the dwelling that now occupies the site. The land on which it stands was granted to Lefferts Pietersen Van Hagewout, who came to this country in 1660 and settled in Flatbush. He received a deed in parchment a year later, signed by Peter Stuyvesant.

Behind the Erasmus Hall High School its old parent Erasmus Hall still stands on Flatbush avenue. Many years ago, Dr. John H. Livingston came to Flatbush, and aided by influential men of the town, agitated for better education. He came to Flatbush during the summer of 1786, and his students of theology came with him. Senator John Vanderbilt became interested in Dr. Livingston's suggestion to have a school in the town other than the village school in the heart of Flatbush, and together they set to work to obtain the support of other influential men. They finally won to the cause Jacob Lefferts, Joris Martense, Peter Lefferts, Johannes E. Lott, William B. Gifford, Peter Cornell, Matthew Clarkson, Aquila Giles, Garret Martense, Cornelius Vanderveer and Justice John Vanderbilt.

A subscription paper was started, and it was not long before a spot was chosen for the new school in the centre of the village on Main road (now Flatbush avenue), opposite the court house and near the place where the village school house stood. Logs were hauled from neighboring farms for the new school, and men from far and near helped in the building. They named it Erasmus Hall, for Desiderius Erasmus, the Dutch scholar who during Henry VIII.'s time brought the "New Learning" to England.

The Governor of the State, members of the Assembly, and many residents of Flatbush attended the first public exhibition held at Erasmus Hall, on September 27, 1787.

Residents of Flatbush cannot have forgotten Melrose Abbey, the picturesque old dwelling that stood on the east side of Bedford avenue until a few years ago. In the days of the Revolution this old Colonial place, built many years before, was the home of Col. William Axtell, a Tory, who purchased it from a Mr. Lane, an Englishman; and it was called far and near Melrose Hall, famous for its broad lawns and flower beds, its wide halls, gilded drawing rooms, and elaborate parties. For Lane himself, who about 1749 had built this house so different from the usual Dutch style of architecture, had led a merry life at the hall; and Col. Axtell, who purchased the property on Lane's death, was no mean host.

It is around Col. William Axtell that the most stirring scenes of the old hall gather—scenes recalled by the grim days of the Revolution; for the smoke of war clouds hung heavy over Melrose Hall, and the din of battle surged without and within its borders.

Days followed when the avenue of white pines resounded with the tread of British soldiers; for Col. Axtell not only welcomed them to Long Island, but he threw open the doors of his home that the Tory leaders might enter. Axtell himself was a member of the King's Council, and for his adherence to the British cause was made a Colonel in Sir William Howe's army. If time could have made a dictagraph of the hours it would have recorded late revels, alluring music, dancing feet, tales of pro-British plots and the clank of chains binding the patriot prisoners concealed in the dungeons of Melrose Hall.

Years later only brave travellers frequented the old Flatbush road after nightfall, and many tales were told of cries heard in the hall and of a white faced young girl who flitted from room to room and peered from the upper windows, sobbing with the pines and restlessly pacing through the night. Years after all these things the bones of a woman were found in the dungeon in the cellar where so many brave patriots brought to the merciless Axtell had died.

The Van Pelt Manor House has been standing in Van Pelt Manor since 1664, and has always been owned and occupied by members of the Van Pelt family. Mrs. Townsend Cortelyou Van Pelt, who lives at the Manor House, is a direct descendant of Sarah de Rapelje, the first female white child born in New Netherlands. Near her home, in front of the Reformed Dutch Church, is the New Utrecht liberty pole, bearing high an ancient eagle and a weather vane spelling "liberty." The late Townsend C. Van Pelt took great pride in the preservation of both eagle and pole. They mark the spot over which the American flag first waved in the town of New Utrecht on the evacuation of the British in 1783.

The Manor House fronts on what was King's Highway, which led from New York to the south. An old milestone, telling of George II.'s time, is even now on the corner. They say it is one of the few remaining milestones in Kings county. Along the old King's Highway passed the travel of the day between Long Island and Philadelphia.

There is a sun dial on the green in front of the Van Pelt Manor House, and a white fence shields the garden from the whirl of the twentieth century. The house is low and white and within and without it tells tales of the old Dutch settlers. There are storied blue tiles about a fireplace. They say that even in Holland there are no older tiles than these. The rooms are low and everywhere are pictures and books and interesting things that make a home.

An old millstone, worn smooth by time, lies in front of the hospitable door of Bensonhurst. Years ago this stone was brought from Holland, and after passing decades in faithful service was finally preserved as a unique threshold for the ancient house that has been famous for the welcome given its guests. Bensonhurst stands near Gravesend Bay, between what is now Benson avenue and Bay Twenty-fourth street. Near the homestead the British landed in Revolutionary times, and far and wide spread themselves over the town.

Nicholas Cowenhoven built the house more than a hundred years ago. His granddaughter Maria married Egbert Benson, and since that time until a few years from generation to generation the Bensons lived and kept the latch string out in their house by the sea.

The homestead itself was sold some years ago to Walter E. Parfitt, who resides there with his family. The house has been changed to suit the needs of the present owners. The Dutch oven, in which many famous dinners were cooked, still stands in the old kitchen. The attic has hand hewn rafters put together with wooden pegs, and many of the rooms, especially in the second story of the house, are quaint and rambling, with nooks and crannies that are found only in houses of long ago.

Within gunshot of the old Van Brunt house on Eighty-fourth street was fought the first battle of the Revolutionary War. Within a good stone's throw of it 15,000 British soldiers and forty pieces of cannon were landed on August 22, 1776. Almost past its very doors surged the stream of redcoated soldiers on their way to quell the rebellious colonists. The first Van Brunt of New Utrecht came from the New Netherlands in the seventeenth century. He was a well known citizen of the town, which he served in various ways, and he was one of the hosts when Attorney-General Nicasius De Sille visited the village early in the year of 1660, and this first Van Brunt with his neighbors assisted in giving their distinguished guest a good dinner and entertainment.

This Van Brunt house was built nearly two centuries and a half ago. It now stands at 1752 Eighty-fourth street, New Utrecht, in very different surroundings from the emerald green of the meadows that bounded it in the early days; for a city has crept up to its quaint old door, to its trees and shrubbery and rose bushes.

The Van Brunt homestead is still owned by the Van Brunt family, though none of the descendants occupy it. Mrs. Barbara Dawson lives there, and takes great pride in the old kitchen with its quaint fireplace, in its low ceilinged rooms, in the rose garden and the picturesque shrubbery that surrounds it, and in the vines that clamber to the very eaves.

The quaint old house that stands, half hidden by hedges, shrubbery and cherry trees, on Neck Road in Gravesend, midway between Gravesend avenue and Van Sicklen street, was the home of Lady Deborah Moody, a famous beauty of early New York. Lady Deborah Moody was several times an exile. Her troubles seem to have begun in England at the time of her husband's death in 1632. She went to London, became interested in religious matters and overstayed the time that a non-resident should remain. Lady Deborah, seeking for civil and religious liberty, decided to emigrate with her son, Sir Henry Moody 2d, to America. In Lynn, Mass., in 1640, Lady Deborah Moody united with the church.

Roger Williams appeared in the colony and Lady Deborah's religious views took a sudden turn from her neighbors' trend of belief. And it was not long before she was excommunicated from the church because she was convinced that the baptism of infants was not of divine ordinance. With a party of English colonists Lady Deborah came to New Amsterdam in 1643 and settled in Gravesend. The house was probably built in that year. The grant to her and her associates from Gov. Kieft comprised Coney Island and all of Gravesend and Sheepshead Bay.

There is much contention as to how the town got its name. Some say that Gov. Kieft named it S'Gravensande, after a sea town on the river Maas, and that the name means Count's Beach. Still others say that the town was named for Gravesend in England.

Around the old milestone in front of the Voorhees homestead on Neck Road, Gravesend, is a pretty little love tale. One hot day a young British officer rode out to Gravesend to place the mile post. He asked for a drink of water at the farmhouse, and a lovely girl gracefully served him. The meeting of the young officer and the maiden resulted in marriage and a journey to faraway England, where, they say, in a noble house hangs a picture of the milestone in front of the homestead from which the English nobleman brought his beautiful bride.

The house is said to have been built more than two centuries ago by one John [illegible] Voorhees, son of the first Voorhees who came to Gravesend. Though little is known of the early history of the homestead, it came into local prominence at the time of the Revolutionary war, when Stephen J. Voorhees joined the American army. On learning that the British were coming, Gen. Washington ordered all supplies to be destroyed, all grain burned in the fields and the cattle killed.

The patriot officers, when they warned the people to kill their cattle, allowed Mrs. Voorhees to keep one cow, that her little [illegible] might have milk, and for safety's sake the lady concealed it in her house. Not long afterward a Hessian came prowling about for beef, and discovering the cow that the thrifty Mrs. Voorhees had concealed he started to drive it off when Mr. Voorhees, who had been separated from his regiment in the battle of Brooklyn and had hastened home, interfered. Words led to blows and the Hessian was killed. Fear lest the other members of the [illegible] would discover the loss of their

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